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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: ADMIRAL FARGO FOCUSES ON AREAS OF CONTINUED AND  
FUTURE COOPERATION WITH VIETNAM MINISTRY OF DEFENSE

1. SUMMARY. COMMANDER, UNITED STATES PACIFIC COMMAND (PACOM) WAS HOSTED BY THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE (MOD) FROM 08-11 FEBRUARY 2004. SENIOR MOD OFFICIALS CHARACTERIZED THE ADMIRAL'S VISIT AS "VERY SUCCESSFUL." IT WAS MARKED BY LESS CAUTION AND MORE WILLINGNESS TO COOPERATE THAN HAS BEEN EXPERIENCED IN PREVIOUS SENIOR DOD VISITS TO VIETNAM, INCLUDING THAT OF THE LAST COMMANDER, PACIFIC COMMAND VISIT TO VIETNAM IN 2002. ADDITIONALLY, IN AN HISTORIC TRIP TO DANANG NAVAL BASE, THE PACOM COMMANDER VISITED COMMANDER THIRD NAVAL REGION AND TOURED TWO OF THE NAVAL REGION'S SHIPS HIS WAS POINTED OUT AS "THE FIRST TIME A U.S. MILITARY OFFICER HAS EVER VISITED A VIETNAMESE NAVAL SHIP."

2. VIETNAM'S DEFENSE LEADERSHIP AGREED TO PURSUE COOPERATION IN COUNTERNARCOTICS AND COUNTERTERRORISM, AND TO CONTINUE COOPERATION IN HUMANITARIAN DEMINING AND UNEXPLODED ORDNANCE (UXO) REMOVAL AND POW/MIA RECOVERY. ADDITIONALLY, VIETNAM'S DEFENSE LEADERSHIP AGREED TO CONTINUE SUPPORT FOR USN SHIP VISITS TO VIETNAM. THE VICE MINISTER OF DEFENSE AND CHIEF OF GENERAL STAFF STATED THAT HE INTENDED TO ATTEND THIS YEAR'S PACOM-SPONSORED CHIEFS OF DEFENSE (CHOD) CONFERENCE TO BE HELD IN JAPAN - TO BE A FIRST FOR VIETNAM AT A CHOD CONFERENCE. VIETNAM WELCOMED ASSISTANCE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TRAINING, CITING THIS AS THE AREA THAT MOST INHIBITS THE VIETNAMESE MILITARY FROM FULLER PARTICIPATION IN REGIONAL DEFENSE ACTIVITIES. HE NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT AGREEING TO THE TERMS OF THE INTERNATIONAL MILITARY EDUCATION AND TRAINING (IMET) AGREEMENT WILL TAKE MUCH LONGER. FINALLY, THE PACOM COMMANDER OBSERVED THAT VIETNAM HAS EXPERTISE TO OFFER WORLDWIDE PEACEKEEPING EFFORTS AND THAT VIETNAM WOULD BE A WELCOME PARTICIPANT IN ONGOING OPERATIONS IN IRAQ AND THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.

MEETINGS

3. LIEUTENANT GENERAL NGUYEN DUC ((SOAT)), DEPUTY CHIEF OF GENERAL STAFF, WAS THE HOST FOR ADMIRAL THOMAS ((FARGO)). ADM FARGO'S ITINERARY INCLUDED A VISIT TO THE NATIONAL DEFENSE ACADEMY AND CALLS WITH VICE MINISTER OF DEFENSE AND CHIEF OF GENERAL STAFF, COLONEL GENERAL PHUNG QUANG ((THANH)); COMMANDER, SEVENTH MILITARY REGION, LIEUTENANT GENERAL NGUYEN VAN ((CHIA)); AND 94 YEAR-OLD, SENIOR GENERAL VO NGUYEN GIAP. AT THE DANANG NAVAL BASE, ADM FARGO WAS HOSTED BY SENIOR CAPTAIN PHAM NGOC ((MINH)), COMMANDER, THIRD NAVAL REGION IN AN HISTORIC VISIT MARKED BY THE FIRST TOUR OF VIETNAMESE NAVY VESSELS BY AN AMERICAN MILITARY OFFICER.

4. THE VISIT BEGAN WITH THE NATIONAL DEFENSE ACADEMY IN HANOI. LIEUTENANT GENERAL NGUYEN THE ((TRI)), DIRECTOR, NATIONAL DEFENSE ACADEMY, WELCOMED AND PRESENTED A SHORT BRIEFING OF THE ACADEMY. ADM FARGO DELIVERED A SPEECH TO THE 20 FACULTY AND STAFF IN ATTENDANCE HIGHLIGHTING THE NEED FOR MULTILATERAL SOLUTIONS TO TRANSNATIONAL PROBLEMS AFFECTING SOUTHEAST ASIA AND THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION, LIKE TERRORISM, NARCOTICS, THE PROLIFERATION AND SHIPMENT OF WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION, THE TRAFFICKING OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN, AND PIRACY.

5. GENERAL SOAT, SERVING AS HOST FOR THE VISIT, WELCOMED ADM FARGO AND HIGHLIGHTED THAT THE VISIT BY DEFENSE MINISTER ((TRA)) TO THE U.S. AND THE SHIP VISIT TO HO CHI MINH CITY BY THE USS VANDEGRIFT WERE IMPORTANT MILESTONES IN THE US VIETNAM DEFENSE RELATIONSHIP. SOAT ALSO NOTED THAT THE GOVERNMENT OF VIETNAM WILL INVITE THE CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF, GENERAL ((MYERS)) TO VISIT VIETNAM THIS YEAR. IN ADDITION, SOAT CONTINUED, WE WELCOME SHIP VISITS AND CONTINUED COOPERATION IN DEMINING AND THE REMOVAL OF UXO. HOWEVER, HE SAID, VIETNAM NEEDS "BETTER TECHNOLOGY IN DEMINING."

6. ADM FARGO RAISED THE IDEA TO BEGIN COOPERATION IN COUNTERNARCOTICS. THIS IS A GROWING PROBLEM IN SOUTHEAST ASIA AND VIETNAM, FARGO NOTED, AND AN AREA IN WHICH PACOM HAS SOME EXPERTISE AND CAN ASSIST. IN FACT, FARGO EXPLAINED, THE JOINT INTERAGENCY TASK FORCE EST (JIATF-WEST) IS AN AGENCY PACOM HAS USED IN OTHER COUNTRIES IN THE REGION, MOST NOTABLY THAILAND, AND THEY ARE VERY EFFECTIVE IN IMPROVING THE POLICE AND MILITARY'S CAPABILITIES IN FIGHTING THIS PROBLEM. SOAT NOTED THAT VIETNAM COOPERATES WITH OTHER COUNTRIES IN THIS AREA AND WELCOMED PURSUING WAYS TO COOPERATE WITH THE U.S.

7. COMMENTING ON THE AGENT ORANGE ISSUE, SOAT NOTED THAT U.S.

VIETNAM COOPERATION WAS AGREED TO DURING THE VISIT BY THEN-  
SECRETARY OF DEFENSE ((COHEN)) TO VIETNAM IN 2000 AND DURING THE

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VISIT BY DEFENSE MINISTER TRA TO SECRETARY ((RUMSFELD)). SEVERAL  
DAYS BEFORE ADM FARGO'S VISIT, SOAT STATED, MOD PRESENTED TO THE  
DAO IN HANOI A PLAN TO COOPERATE IN THE REMEDIATION OF DIOXINS AT  
FOUR SITES: BIEN HOA, DANANG AND PHU CAT AIRFIELDS AND CUU MONG  
PASS. SOAT STRESSED THAT VIETNAM HOPED FOR COOPERATION WITH THE  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE. ADM FARGO STATED WE WOULD LOOK AT  
THIS PLAN.

18. ADM FARGO NOTED THAT VIETNAM IS RECOGNIZED FOR ITS CAPABILITY  
IN CERTAIN AREAS AND COULD MAKE SOME SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTIONS TO  
THE INTERNATIONAL EFFORT IN PEACEKEEPING. SOAT DID NOT DIRECTLY  
RESPOND, BUT DID NOT BACK AWAY OR REJECT THE PROPOSAL OF  
VIETNAM'S PARTICIPATION IN THIS AREA.

19. IN THE AREA OF POW/MIA RECOVERY, SOAT QUICKLY NOTED THAT THIS  
IS CONSIDERED A HUMANITARIAN EFFORT THAT WILL CONTINUE TO BE  
SUPPORTED BY VIETNAM. HE NOTED THAT, RECOVERIES ARE NOW IN MORE  
REMOTE AREAS, AND THIS WILL REQUIRE MORE FUNDING. SOAT  
ADDITIONALLY NOTED THAT VIETNAM'S MISSING ARE IN EXCESS OF  
300,000 AND REQUESTED ASSISTANCE IN INFORMATION THAT COULD LEAD  
TO THE RECOVERY OF THESE REMAINS. ADM FARGO NOTED THAT THE US  
WILL ASSIST VIETNAM IN THIS AREA.

110. ADDITIONALLY, FARGO STRESSED, THE USG NEEDS VIETNAMESE  
ASSISTANCE IN ARCHIVAL RESEARCH AND BILATERAL EFFORTS TO RECOVER  
UNDERWATER REMAINS OF AMERICAN MIA'S. REFERRING TO UNDERWATER  
RECOVERIES, ADM FARGO PRESENTED SOAT WITH A PHOTO OF THE TYPE OF  
SALVAGE SHIP THAT PACOM IS PROPOSING TO USE IN THE JOINT RECOVERY  
OF US REMAINS UNDERWATER. ADDITIONALLY, FARGO RECOMMENDED THAT  
THERE BE A BILATERAL WORKING GROUP ESTABLISHED TO SPECIFICALLY  
LOOK AT WAYS TO JOINTLY ADDRESS THIS IMPORTANT EFFORT. FARGO  
PROPOSED SENDING VIETNAMESE EXPERTS TO PACOM TO INSPECT THE US  
SALVAGE SHIP AND TRAIN WITH US SALVAGE EXPERTS, FOLLOWED BY  
CONDUCTING A JOINT US/VIETNAM SALVAGE RECOVERY WITH BOTH  
VIETNAMESE AND US NAVY SALVAGE SHIPS. SOAT INITIALLY RESPONDED  
THAT, "AS YOU KNOW, THE EAST SEA (I.E. SOUTH CHINA SEA) IS A  
VERY SENSITIVE AREA." HE ALSO REITERATED THAT IF THE VIETNAMESE  
SHIP IS NOT CAPABLE, THE US CAN PROVIDE TECHNICAL IMPROVEMENTS  
FOR THE VIETNAMESE SHIP. HE MADE CLEAR THAT THE NEXT STEP SHOULD  
BE A VIETNAMESE SHIP, POSSIBLY AUGMENTED WITH US EQUIPMENT,  
SEARCHING FOR UNDERWATER REMAINS. THIS TOPIC WAS CLOSED BY BOTH  
SOAT AND FARGO AGREEING TO FORM A BILATERAL WORKING GROUP OF  
EXPERTS TO LOOK AT UNDERWATER RECOVERY COOPERATION.

111. COLONEL GENERAL PHUNG QUANG THANH WAS THE MOST SENIOR DEFENSE  
OFFICIAL VISITED. (COMMENT: MOD PROVIDED AN ITINERARY THAT  
INCLUDED A CALL WITH DEFENSE MINISTER SENIOR GENERAL PHAM VAN  
TRA. UNFORTUNATELY, HE WAS NOT AVAILABLE ON THE DAY OF THE CALL  
AFTER THE PRIME MINISTER SUDDENLY DEPLOYED MEMBERS OF THE CABINET  
THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY TO MONITOR THE NATIONAL RESPONSE TO AVIAN  
FLU.) GENERAL THANH HIGHLIGHTED FOR ADM FARGO THAT THE U.S.-  
VIETNAMESE DEFENSE RELATIONSHIP HAD IMPROVED GREATLY IN 2003 WITH  
THE VISIT TO THE U.S. BY DEFENSE MINISTER PHAM VAN TRA AND THE  
VISIT TO VIETNAM BY THE USS VANDEGRIFT. THANH ADDED, "I HOPE WE  
WILL WORK TOGETHER TO COOPERATE TO BUILD" THE RELATIONSHIP  
FURTHER.

112. IMET. IN DISCUSSING THE INTERNATIONAL MILITARY EDUCATION AND  
TRAINING (IMET) PROGRAM, ADM FARGO INDICATED THAT VIETNAM MUST  
SIGN THE THIRD PARTY TRANSFER AGREEMENT, REFERRED TO AS THE 505  
AGREEMENT OF THE FOREIGN ASSISTANCE ACT, BEFORE IT IS ELIGIBLE TO  
PARTICIPATE IN IMET-RELATED TRAINING. THANH COMMENTED THE IMET  
AGREEMENT WILL TAKE MUCH MORE TIME TO APPROVE, BUT STRESSED THAT  
ENGLISH TRAINING WITHOUT IMET IS VERY WELCOMED. GENERAL THANH  
COMMENTED THAT AUSTRALIA AND INDIA PROVIDE ENGLISH TRAINING, BUT  
THIS REMAINS THE AREA THAT MOST INHIBITS VIETNAM'S MILITARY FROM  
FULLER PARTICIPATION IN REGIONAL DEFENSE ACTIVITIES. ADM FARGO  
NOTED THAT THIS IS AN AREA WE CAN COOPERATE IN ASSURED GENERAL  
THANH THAT PACOM WILL LOOK INTO DEVELOPING AN ENGLISH TRAINING  
PROGRAM THAT CAN TRAIN 30-35 STUDENTS ANNUALLY. THANH WAS VERY  
SUPPORTIVE OF THIS INITIATIVE.

113. COUNTERTERRORISM AND COUNTERNARCOTICS COOPERATION. ADM  
FARGO OBSERVED THAT THE U.S. PACIFIC COMMAND AND VIETNAM SHOULD  
BEGIN COOPERATION IN COUNTERTERRORISM AND COUNTERNARCOTICS.  
GENERAL THANH NOTED THAT BOTH OF THESE AREAS WERE NOT UNDER THE  
PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY OF THE MOD, BUT RATHER UNDER THE MINISTRY  
OF PUBLIC SECURITY (MPS). THANH WELCOMED COOPERATION IN  
COUNTERTERRORISM. HE INDICATED THAT VIETNAM WAS ON HIGH ALERT  
FOR TERRORISTS, BUT "SINCE VIETNAM HAS LITTLE EXPERIENCE IN THIS  
AREA," ASSISTANCE WOULD BE APPRECIATED.

114. THANH STATED THAT FOR COUNTERNARCOTICS WORK, MOD USES THE  
BORDER GUARD FORCES, WHO HAVE BEEN ASSIGNED TO WORK WITH MPS TO  
FIGHT THIS PROBLEM. ADM FARGO INDICATED THAT PACOM CAN DEPLOY  
THE JOINT INTERAGENCY TASK FORCE EST (JIATF-WEST) TO WORK WITH  
VIETNAMESE MILITARY AND POLICE IN FIGHTING THE PROLIFERATION OF  
NARCOTICS. THIS IS SOMETHING THAT HAS WORKED VERY WELL IN OTHER  
SOUTHEAST ASIA COUNTRIES LIKE THAILAND AND "I THINK WILL ALSO  
WORK WELL IN VIETNAM," ADM FARGO NOTED. THANH COMMENTED AGAIN  
THAT THIS WAS AN AREA THAT WAS PRIMARILY UNDER THE  
RESPONSIBILITY OF MPS.

115. LIEUTENANT GENERAL CHIA. GENERAL CHIA WARMLY GREETED ADM FARGO, HIGHLIGHTING THE IMPORTANCE OF THE VISIT TO THE US BY DEFENSE MINISTER TRA AND THE US NAVY SHIP VISIT TO HO CHI MINH CITY. CHIA RECALLED THAT DEFENSE MINISTER TRA AND SECRETARY RUMSFELD SPOKE OF CONTINUED SUPPORT IN THE POW/MIA EFFORT AND IN THE DEMINING/UXO REMOVAL PROGRAM. CHIA LAMENTED THAT TO DATE, USG ASSISTANCE IN HUMANITARIAN DEMINING/UXO REMOVAL HAD BEEN LIMITED TO THE CENTRAL PROVINCES OF QUANG BINH AND THUA THIEN HUE AND HOPED THAT THIS PROGRAM CAN ADDRESS A SERIOUS UXO PROBLEM IN THE SOUTH. IT WAS NOTED BY AMBASSADOR THAT IT WAS, IN FACT NOT THE DECISION OF USG TO LIMIT THE DEMINING/UXO REMOVAL PROGRAM, BUT RATHER THE VIETNAM NATIONAL GOVERNMENT. CHIA CONTINUED THAT THE LOCATIONS OF FORMER US MILITARY BASES WERE STILL VERY CONTAMINATED WITH UXO AND THIS WAS LIMITING COMMERCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. CHIA STRESSED THAT, IN ADDITION TO THE PROGRAMS ALREADY UNDERWAY; THERE SHOULD BE EXCHANGES OF MID AND JUNIOR-LEVEL OFFICERS AS A WAY TO BETTER DEVELOP THE DEFENSE RELATIONSHIP. ADM FARGO NOTED THAT WE CAN SHARE OUR BEST PRACTICES IN DEMINING.

116. ADM FARGO ASKED CHIA ABOUT THE SECURITY SITUATION ALONG SEVENTH MILITARY REGION'S CAMBODIAN BORDER. CHIA RESPONDED THAT THE 615-KILOMETER BORDER WITH CAMBODIA IS SECURE. THERE WERE INSTANCES 10 YEARS AGO WHEN SOME PEOPLE TRIED TO TRANSPORT WEAPONS AND EXPLOSIVES ACROSS THE BORDER, BUT THE MILITARY IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE BORDER GUARD PREVENTED THIS FROM HAPPENING. CHIA NOTED, "IN THE PAST 10 YEARS THERE HAVE BEEN NO CASES OF TRANSPORTING WEAPONS OR EXPLOSIVES ACROSS THE BORDER," THANKS TO A TRADITIONALLY GOOD RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE BORDER GUARDS AND THE MILITARY.

117. WHEN ASKED ABOUT THE PROLIFERATION OF MANPADS, CHIA RESPONDED THAT, IN VIETNAM WE ARE NOT WORRIED ABOUT SUCH LARGE WEAPONS, BUT WE ARE WORRIED ABOUT SMALLER WEAPONS AND EXPLOSIVES.

118. IN DANANG ADM FARGO MET WITH THE COMMANDER OF THE THIRD NAVAL REGION, SENIOR CAPTAIN PHAM NGOC MINH ALONG WITH HIS EXTENDED STAFF. DISCUSSIONS INCLUDED THE MISSION OF NAVAL REGION THREE AND THE NAVAL BASE IN DANANG. THIS CORDIAL MEETING WAS FOLLOWED BY A FIRST TIME TOUR OF SRV NAVY PATROL BOATS BY US MILITARY PERSONNEL. THE TOUR INCLUDED A ((TURYA)) CLASS FAST ATTACK TORPEDO CRAFT, AND AN ((OSA II)) CLASS FAST ATTACK MISSILE CRAFT. ADM FARGO WAS GREETED BY EACH BOAT'S CREW AND GIVEN A BRIEF TOUR, WITH THE CAPTAIN OF EACH BOAT ANSWERING QUESTIONS DURING THE TOUR. THE TOUR WAS FOLLOWED BY A THIRD NAVAL REGION SPONSORED LUNCH WITH ADM FARGO AND HIS STAFF.

119. ADMIRAL FARGO HELD A SYMBOLIC, BUT IMPORTANT VISIT WITH SENIOR GENERAL VO NGUYEN GIAP. THE DISCUSSION BETWEEN ADM FARGO AND GENERAL GIAP WAS DOMINATED BY EMPHASIS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF THE BILATERAL DEFENSE RELATIONSHIP. ACCESS TO 94 YEAR-OLD GENERAL GIAP IS GUARDED CLOSELY BY THE GVN. AFTER COMMENTING HE HAD RECEIVED REPORTS THE VISIT HAD RECEIVED "GOOD RESULTS", GIAP RAISED TWO AREAS IA AND AGENT ORANGE COOPERATION. GIAP STATED THAT VIETNAM IS COMMITTED TO SUPPORTING THE UNITED STATES IN THE SEARCH FOR MISSING IN ACTION CASES AND ASKED FOR HELP IN LOCATING VIETNAM'S MISSING. IN TALKING ABOUT AGENT ORANGE, GIAP COMMENTED THAT THIS ISSUE HAS A NEGATIVE IMPACT ON OUR RELATIONSHIP AND HE STATED, "I WELCOME CONSIDERATION OF US HELP IN THIS AREA". IN DEVELOPING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS GIAP NOTED IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT THE VIETNAMESE PEOPLE HAVE A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF AMERICANS AND VICE VERSA. (COMMENTS: IT WAS CLEAR GIAP WAS A STRONG SUPPORTED OF US N RELATIONS.)

#### COMMENTS

120. THE VISIT OF ADM FARGO WAS MARKED BY A POSITIVE TONE AND WILLINGNESS TO COOPERATE THAT HAS NOT BEEN EVIDENT IN PREVIOUS VISITS WITH THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE. CLEARLY, ACCESS TO DANANG NAVAL BASE AND SENIOR GENERAL GIAP, THOUGH LARGELY SYMBOLIC, WERE CONSIDERED TO BE SIGNS OF A CLOSER DEFENSE RELATIONSHIP AND ARE INDICATIVE OF THE STATE OF THE WARMING BILATERAL MIL-TO-MIL RELATIONSHIP. IMPORTANT ELEMENTS OF THE VISIT ARE THE COMMITMENTS TO COOPERATE, ESPECIALLY ON COUNTERTERRORISM, COUNTERNARCOTICS, DEMINING AND UXO REMOVAL, AND POW/MIA RECOVERY. BURGHARDT